

PCC 126. French Music Appreciation

Prof. Bruno Bossis

Lecture

Tuesday 2:30-5:30pm

Office Hours

By appointment

Section

Wednesday 11:00am - 12:00pm

Introduction to the development of orchestral and electronic music in France.

French music in the twentieth century has been a magnet which attracted composers from all over the world ; its trademarks are invention of new forms, coloristic innovation, new orchestral textures, and use of new instruments, all of which woven into music aimed at the pleasure of listening. The course will show that even with some composers who have been called 'difficult' or 'dry', there is much to be found in terms of enjoyable sounds. And France has been the country which invented electronic music, right at the end of the late forties. Even latter-day Djs refer fondly to Pierre Henry and Pierre Schaeffer.

The course will focus on the major composers who have shaped the musical discourse of the last century. Some of their most well known pieces will be presented and discussed. For instance, piano pieces by Debussy (La cathédrale engloutie...), orchestral music (La Mer) and opera (Pelleas and Mélisande) ; music by Eric Satie ; orchestral music by Ravel (Boléro, Concerto in G...) ; music by Olivier Messiaen (chamber and orchestral music) ; the birth of musique concrète and electronic music ; the Serial school (Pierre Boulez) ; the Spectral school (Murail, Grisey), and electronic music. The French Music class is worth **6.0 quarter units**.

COURSE MATERIALS

- A Course Reader ([CR] hereafter)
- MP3 players are available for listening to your coursework at the UC center.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to do each week's readings before the first week's session, and to attend the mandatory site visits.

- Weekly Readings and Class participation (30%)
- Writing Assignments, a research paper, 4 pages (20%)
- Mid-term exam (20%)
- Final exam (30%)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1. September 10-14

Introduction – Claude Debussy and symbolism

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) is considered as the most important French composer in the early twentieth century. His music gives a transition between Wagner music and modernist music. After the 1890s, Debussy developed an independent musical language, writing orchestral and small pieces. For him, the sound colors are more important than the construction and linking of chords. Close to Symbolism, a literary and art movement,

Debussy was active in the artistic circles of Paris. His well-known opera *Pelléas and Mélisande* is one of the most important music piece of European music: it tells a strange story of a young woman in a mysterious mood.

Listening: *Pelléas and Mélisande* (Claude Debussy)

Week 2. September 17-21

The French style and Maurice Ravel

Born in the South of France, Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) was influenced by Debussy as well as by Mozart. His music is both impressionistic and strongly structured. Clarity, as most French music, is one of the most important idea of his musical style. Other influences like jazz, European folk songs and Asian music make his works varied and easy to hear. His *Bolero* is still a hit, but all his orchestral works, songs and operas (the funny *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*) are also quite popular and often played.

Listening: *Bolero*, *Concerto in G* (Maurice Ravel)

Week 3. September 24-28

Eric Satie and L'école d'Arcueil

A composer, pianist and writer, Eric Satie (1866-1925) is a precursor of many of the avant-garde artistic ideas. He known Debussy, lived in Montmartre in Paris and became the official composer and chapel-master of the Rosicrucian Order. In 1898, he moved to Arcueil, a suburb of Paris. The composers around him formed L'école d'Arcueil. In his music and writings, he used simplicity and humour. The titles of his pieces are e.g. *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire* (Tree pieces in the shape of a pear) or *Véritables Préludes flasques (pour un chien)* (Genuine Flabby Preludes (for a dog)). In 1919, he met Tristan Tzara, the initiator of the Dada movement, Picabia and Duchamp. He composed the music of the surrealist film *Entr'acte* by René Clair.

Listening: *Parade* (Eric Satie)

RESEARCH PAPER – 4 PAGES

Week 4. October 1-5

The 1920s at Paris, the Groupe des six

In 1917, Erik Satie assembled a group of composers around himself known as *Les Nouveaux Jeunes*. Less than a year after, Satie left the group and, in 1918, Jean Cocteau published the text *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* with the idea to form an avant-garde group devoted to music. The composers of the *Groupe des six* were Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Tailleferre. The 1920s at Paris, between the first and the Second World War, merged multiple influences as jazz, European and non-European folk cultures, circus and ballet.

Listening: *Le Bœuf sur le toit* (Darius Milhaud)

Week 5. October 8-12

Music around Ballets Russes at Paris and Monte Carlo

In 1909, the Russian impresario Diaghilev created a ballet company named the Ballets Russes. Influenced by the great choreographer Marius Petipa, Diaghilev established his ballet at Paris then Monte Carlo. Balanchine, Fokine, Lifar and many other dancers and choreographers were associated with the ballet. Painters Braque, Picasso and Utrillo participated as stage designers. The greatest French composers of this time wrote some ballet music for the Ballets Russes: Debussy, Milhaud, Poulenc, Ravel and Satie. Stravinsky, very active in France at the time (he later moved to Los Angeles), must also be named. His famous ballet *Le Sacre du printemps* (The Rite of Spring) was composed between 1912 and 1913 for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes: its first performance at Théâtre des Champs Élysées created quite a stir!

Listening: *L'après-midi d'un faune* (Claude Debussy), *Le Sacre du printemps* (Stravinsky)

Week 6. October 15-19

Olivier Messiaen, new colors in music

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) was an organist and ornithologist. Incarcerated by the Nazis in 1940, he composed his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (Quartet for the end of time) for his fellow inmates. Very famous in France and in the whole world, his music is both complex and beautiful to hear. He was attracted to rhythms from ancient Greece and from Indian music. He was interested by serialism, gamelan, birdsongs (*Oiseaux exotiques*) and electronic instruments and used the electronic *onduleur Martenot* extensively. His faith, drawing on his unshakeable Catholicism, strongly influenced his music as in *Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus* (Twenty gazes on the child Jesus) for piano.

Listening: *Turangalila-Symphonie* (Olivier Messiaen)

Week 7. October 22-26

MID-TERM EXAM

Week 8. November 5-9

Serial school and Boulez

Serialism is a musical technique of writing using sequences ("series") of elements (pitches, durations, etc.). The serialist composer manipulates these sequences in various but strict ways (forward, backward, inverted...). Born in Vienna (Austria) before the Second World War with Schoenberg, Webern and Berg, serialism was first introduced in France by René Leibowitz in 1947. In the 1950s, composers such as Boulez (born in 1925) began to look at serial composition as an approach rather than a specific set of techniques (*Le Marteau sans maître*). Afterward, Boulez combined rigour of serialism with aleatory techniques (*Third Piano Sonata*) and computer-generated sounds (*Répons*). Boulez is also a conductor of renown (New York Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony Orchestra), a great writer on music. He is also the founder of the French music research center, IRCAM, at the Pompidou Center..

Listening: *Le Marteau sans maître* (Pierre Boulez)

Week 9. November 12-16

Birth of musique concrète and electronic music

Pierre Schaeffer (1910–1995) was a scientist, a composer, a writer, and is known as the inventor of *musique concrète*. Traditionally, music starts as an abstraction (the score), which is then produced into audible music. In the contrary, Schaeffer explained that *musique concrète* strives to start with recorded sounds ('concrete' elements), and turn them into an abstract musical composition. For Schaeffer, all kind of sounds could be included in music. He is a precursor to contemporary sampling practices. At the studio of Paris (in relationship with radio), Pierre Henry has been the most important composer of the Schaeffer's staff. Today, Henry is a reference for popular musicians. The studio still exists under the name GRM (2008 will be its 50th anniversary).

Listening: *Messe pour le temps présent* (Henry), *Toupie dans le ciel* (Bayle)

Week 10. November 19-23

Spectral school

Spectralism, a movement born in France in the 1970s, features the use of sound as a model for composition. The best known spectral composers at the origin of the movement are Dufourt, Grisey, Murail and Levinas. Like Debussy, Varèse and Schaeffer, the sound for itself is the core of the composition. Scientific analysis of one sound gives the partials and harmonics. On this model, composers write music, generally with traditional instruments. The spectralists' attitude of rigorous objectivity can be considered a continuation of modernism, as serialists, though in a very different way. Today, spectralism influences many composers.

Listening: *Transitoires* (Grisey), *L'Esprit des dunes* (Murail)

Week 11. November 26-30

IRCAM and electronic music

In the 1970s, President Pompidou discussed with Boulez the possibility of creating an institute at Paris where musicians and scientists ought to work together. This was to become IRCAM, a research center with the most advanced technology. In the beginnings, electronic music was most often recorded on tape, which thus 'fixed' it. Today, synthesized or transformed sounds, and spatialization, are often computed in real time. Another approach is computer assisted composition. One of the main member of the first staff was Jean-Claude Risset (who worked with Max Mathews in the USA). Boulez (*Anthèmes 2*, *Répons*), and Manoury (*Jupiter, K.*) are among the French composers close to IRCAM. Jonathan Harvey, an English musician, is also a great composer of Ircam. Today, IRCAM, as other electronic studios in France, is still thriving on electronic music, with an opening to dance, multimedia, performance and network arts.

Listening: *Jupiter* (Manoury), *Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco* (Harvey)

Week 12. December 3-7

Independent composers, from Dutilleux to François-Bernard Mâche

Henri Dutilleux (born in 1916) is one of the most important French composers of the second half of the 20th century, producing works in the tradition of Debussy and Ravel, but in a style distinctly his own. Dutilleux has always refused to be associated with any school. However, his music merges traditional and modernist innovations. His music also contains echoes of jazz as can be heard in the double bass introduction to his *First Symphony*. Maurice Ohana

(1913-1992) was a French composer with a personal musical language. Interested by Mediterranean folk music and electroacoustic music, he worked in direction of a sound exploration without intellectual reference. François-Bernard Mâche, born in 1935, is a former student of Messiaen. As writer and composer, his thought explores myths, language and philosophy. He has composed electroacoustic, orchestral, chamber, choral, vocal and piano works.

Listening: First Symphony (Dutilleux), L'Estuaire du temps (Mâche)